



Leveraging Petroleum Brownfields Sites: 901 Central Avenue, Great Falls

Jeff Kuhn, DEQ

The petroleum cleanup project known as "901 Central Avenue, Great Falls" has achieved state cleanup standards and is officially resolved. The business that now occupies the property, "True Brew," is open and thriving. The site is a great example of a blighted commercial site that has found new life after environmental cleanup leveraged by the Brownfields Program. The Brownfields Program utilizes federal funding to assist underutilized properties whose redevelopment is hindered due to the stigma of an environmental problem. Sites must qualify for the Brownfields Program and have a demonstrated community benefit.

The property has seen a number of uses over the years, including a Phillips 66 Service Station, an automotive service center, and A-1 Transmission. After the closure of A-1 Transmission, the property sat vacant for 10 years.



Before Brownfields Funding (2009)



After Brownfields Funding (2015)

A local developer, Platinum, LLC, envisioned the redevelopment potential for the property and conducted an environmental site assessment (ESA) 2007. The ESA confirmed the presence of a petroleum release. Platinum, LLC worked with the previous owner to meet DEQ's petroleum site assessment requirements. Fortunately, the site was eligible for Petroleum Tank Release Compensation Fund (PTRCF, or "Petro-Fund") reimbursement. The Petro-Fund's assurance of cleanup reimbursement facilitated Platinum, LLC's purchase of the property in 2008. A cleanup plan for the site was approved by DEQ in early 2009. However, at that time money was not available from the Petro-Fund to be obligated for the work, and it appeared that the site might continue to sit vacant for an extended period of time.

Petroleum Brownfields to the rescue! The Great Falls Development Authority (GFDA) received a Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) Grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2005. A portion of this grant is earmarked for eligible petroleum brownfield sites. During the summer of 2009, DEQ and GFDA partnered and identified the property at 901 Central Avenue as a potential candidate for a Brownfields RLF loan. PTRCF staff worked with Platinum, LLC and GFDA to negotiate repayment terms and write a letter of obligation for repayment of the loan.

In May 2010, approximately 3,060 cubic yards of contaminated soil was excavated and hauled to a landfarming site for remediation. Confirmation soil sampling at the time of cleanup demonstrated that nearly all of the petroleum contaminated soil present on-site was successfully removed by the excavation work. Three new monitoring wells were subsequently installed on the property, and semi-annual groundwater monitoring confirmed that the site achieved DEQ cleanup levels.

The expedited cleanup allowed the immediate construction of a new Mountain Mudd Espresso coffee kiosk (now "True-Brew Espresso") and an adjacent

landscaped park. Because of the vision and patience of Platinum, LLC, an environmental liability was removed, jobs were created, and a valuable business now exists for the benefit of Great Falls. This was done through a collaborative effort between the private sector, GFDA, and the cooperation of federal and state agencies. This partnership successfully transformed a blighted, downtown corner with a dilapidated building and a significant environmental liability, into a walk-up and drive-through coffee shop with a small park.

Many communities in Montana currently have Brownfield assessment and/or RLF grant funds available to them for the redevelopment of similar blighted properties. DEQ, in partnership with local governments and economic development authorities, are looking for opportunities to use this funding to benefit local communities. The criteria used to evaluate the eligibility of possible Petroleum Brownfield sites can be found on-line at:

<http://deq.mt.gov/Brownfields/MTBrownfieldsPrograms.mcpix>.